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ABSTRACT

This introductory paper reviews the development of Maori language total immersion courses for adults, based on the author's own experience. Total immersion courses were established as part of the Maori mission under the Whakatupuranga Rua Mano-Generation 2000 tribal program. The program supports Maori people who can "karanga" (do a high-pitched call by senior women or elders), "whaikorero" (do formal speechmaking), and who can make a real contribution in terms of the Maori language and cultural centers, the "maraes" (a cultural center that includes a meeting house and dining hall, usually situated on Maori reserve land). The 7-day courses were designed as "language nests" for adults. Course development, eventual program changes, and organizations, recreation, and philosophy are described. (LB)

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Maori Total Immersion Courses for Adults in *Aotearoa*/New Zealand: A Personal Perspective

Rangi Nicholson

He kororia ki te Atua i runga rawa
He maunga-a-rongo ki runga i te mata o te whenua
He whakaaro pai ki nga tangata katoa

Glory to God on high
Peace on earth
Good will to all people

Tena koutou katoa. This brief introductory paper is dedicated to God, the creator of the Maori language, and to all those members of our tribal confederation -- *Ngati Raukawa, Ngati Toarangatira* and *Te Atiawa* -- as well as members of other tribes in *Aotearoa*/New Zealand who over the last ten years have contributed in any way to the development of Maori language total immersion courses for adults. *Kia maturuturu te tomairangi o Tona atawhai ki runga ki a koutou katoa.*

Introduction

In the 1970's there was a survey made among *Ngati Raukawa ki te Au-o-te Tonga*, a Maori tribe situated in the southwest of the North Island, *Aotearoa*/New Zealand, to determine how our tribe rated in terms of their tribalness, language, and economic position. That survey made it clear that the Maori language was fast disappearing. There were less than one hundred fluent speakers of Maori. To turn the situation around, total immersion courses were established as part of the Maori mission under the *Whakatupuranga Rua*

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Mano-Generation 2000 tribal program. This program supports members of our people who can *karanga* (do a high pitched call by senior women or elders), *whaikorero* (do formal speechmaking) and who can make a real contribution in terms of the Maori language and our Maori cultural centres, our *maraes*.[1] These courses were designed as *kohanga reo* or language nests for adults.

A group of speakers was gathered together in 1979, from inside and outside our district, sympathetic people who were working in our region, not necessarily of our tribe, but interested in what we were planning and happy to help with the experiment. I initially thought that a total immersion program where only Maori was going to be spoken and English banned was "a bloody stupid idea." I was unsure as to whether it was going to work, and I did not know how I could survive in an all Maori environment. I remember that a lot of other people shared my uncertainty about the idea.

Some people found total immersion very stressful. When you are placed in a situation for the first time where you can speak only Maori, you can actually be too petrified to say anything. You are in the situation where you have to throw your nets out and haul them in hoping that something is there that can keep you going. It was a new experience for people. During the first courses, you had to survive as best you could taking along your dictionaries and other material you thought would help. It was hard going and it took two or three courses before I could commit myself to staying the full time.

The first course was ten days, but now courses are seven days long. They begin on Sunday afternoon with a time when the course philosophy and organization is explained in English so that people know what is going to happen during the week. Then, on Sunday night a self-imposed ban is put on English. Only Maori is spoken. The ban is lifted on the following Saturday night, and the next morning is spent

[1] A *marae* is a Maori cultural center which includes a meeting house and a dining hall usually situated on Maori reserve land.

cleaning up and having a session where the students say how they felt about the course. Then we have lunch and say farewells. So it is really Sunday afternoon to Sunday afternoon for the full course, but there is flexibility. We have finished courses earlier when it has suited us.

At first the courses were held only once a year, but now they are held during the January, May, and August school holidays. Each course builds on the previous one. The May course builds on the January one and the August course builds on the previous two in a sequential fashion. The early courses were of a survival type, but today they are more tightly organized with a greater variety of situations for learning. The resource people are mainly *kaumatua* (elders) with some trained teachers of Maori and fluent course graduates. The elders have been pretty accepting right from the start as long as we spoke Maori. There are one or two *kaumatua* who certainly would not accept hearing English.

The first time I managed to maintain the ban and stay from start to finish, there was really a great feeling of satisfaction that I had been able to survive speaking only the language of my ancestors. We survived with sign language and pantomime. We didn't say much. There was no chit-chat. We spent our time listening to tutors. There was not much interaction between tutor and student, and there was listening for long periods of time. It was very tiring with a lot of lecture-type presentations. People felt that if you listened a lot to the language you would somehow benefit.

My memories of the early courses are summed up in what happened at mealtimes. I can remember people sort of just sitting there. It was a bit like monks in a monastery. What you could mainly hear was the scraping of knives and forks on plates. People were looking at each other and wondering what on earth they could say. And I think one of the big changes, if you go to an immersion course today, is that you can hear a buzz of conversation. At those first *hui*, there was quite a bit of miscommunication. The messages people were sending were not always the messages being received. Miscommunication is always a danger in a total immersion course. In certain critical situations, such as when a pot is

boiling over and the power needs to be switched off in a hurry, there is a need to get a response from someone quickly. This is not always possible for new speakers of Maori using only Maori.

The courses were long and the hours were long. There was such a lot of listening and that is tiring, especially when you do not know the language well. Sometimes an elder could be speaking at three in the morning. Many people left feeling mental and physical wrecks. The first students were mainly older people in their forties or fifties.

Developments

While the first courses were fairly unstructured, they have become more organized, in the sense that people now come expecting a variety of different teaching approaches. We now have a much more structured program as a result of an elder saying that we must have a well thought out program to make the best use of limited time. As a result of his comments, we produced a course outline and timetable. Every hour or so we have a change of activity. Usually three classes operate at the same time. We plan to stop our program at about ten o'clock, so that people can get at least 7-8 hours sleep. Living on a *marae* and coping with learning the language can be exhausting. In fact, I am thinking of stopping the evening programs at nine o'clock for this reason.

Also, these days, the course is part of the degree program at *Te Wananga o Raukawa* -- the private Maori university at *Otaki*. *Wananga* students are credited with a certain number of hours for attending the courses, so we have to be a lot more organized. We have new people coming all the time, but because we are spending such a long time on the *marae*, it tends to suit younger learners now. The majority are in their twenties and thirties.

The immersion courses are open to people outside our tribal area. There are now three groups accepted for courses. First, the *Te Wananga o Raukawa* students are taken as they are the group the courses are mainly designed for, so they get priority. Second priority is *Ngati Raukawa, Ngati Toa*, and *Te Atiawa*, who are supporting their *marae* or who are Grade 11

or 12 students studying Maori. The third group are those people we think would really benefit. They are sometimes students from other universities or just other interested learners.

Our courses have become well-known and accepted in our own tribal area. More people are wanting to come along, so the number of places for people outside our region is now very limited which, I think, is a good sign for us. Unfortunately, we just cannot meet all the needs now being expressed. We just do not have the resources to open the door to every person who would like to spend a week listening and speaking Maori, so we are beginning to invite mainly those from other tribes who are likely to take away some of the organizational ideas and set up their own immersion courses. We have about 30 to 35 students in each course. We try to limit participants as we find the optimum number for each class is about 12, but we sometimes end up with larger classes.

The Program

One of the big changes started a few years ago when we got our elders, tutors, and students together at *Te Wananga* in Otaki. By the end of that day, we decided on a list of tasks that our students should be able to do after three years. These jobs ranged from being able to answer questions on tribal customs to taking part in debates, from learning tribal sung poetry to doing some teaching in our primary and secondary schools.

My job was to decide what we expected from students at the end of each year. One of the main aims was that at the end of the three years -- after nine immersion courses -- the students should be able to organize their own course for their *hapu* (sub-tribe). The main practical aim of the immersion courses is actually to produce teachers and organizers so that others can learn.

One of the good things that has happened is that we now have a number of students at *Te Wananga* who have become tutors at the immersion courses. We have been really fortunate so far to have elders that turn up at course after course. These elders have given us so much. For these people to spend six or seven days or indeed anytime at all with young

people is a very good thing. It is a promising sign to have these younger people coming through -- people who will end up handing on the treasures that these elders have given us.

Before each course there is about ten to twelve hours preparation. Students are sent a range of tasks to do. These can be preparing their five minute talk, getting arguments for a debate, collecting survival phrases, and so forth. In this way they begin to tune in.

For each course we have a variety of levels of students, activities, and teaching styles. The program needs to be interesting for the students and at their levels, so it is good to have a range of activities. For instance, we might have students grouped around having readings from the Bible and discussions on these. After an hour of that, they might move into an hour of practising singing traditional poetry. From there they might move into small discussion groups or pair activities, which I think are important.

We use *Te Karere*, the nightly ten minute national news in Maori, on television in two ways. Firstly, to tune into the outside world (that was a bit difficult in the days of three minute *Te Karere* programs!). The other has been with video tapes. One of the exercises has been to show people how the *Te Karere* news bulletin is put together. You have the announcer, the reporter, and the person being interviewed and the language style each uses. We get the students to look for clues which help the listener to get more out of *Te Karere*.

In our courses we always aim to have a balance of listening, talking, and doing. Students also help with the work on the *marae*. We divide all the students into *whanau* which are really support groups made up of people at all levels. Each *whanau* is given a job to do each day -- working in the kitchen, clearing and setting tables, cleaning out the shower and toilet block, and generally tidying the *marae*. This gives a chance for another sort of language. If necessary, students can refer to charts on the walls and write down new vocabulary. The older ones who have more language obviously take more leadership in this situation.

In addition, every student has to stand up in front of the whole class and give a short talk. That is quite a challenge!

We try to help each person get to the stage where their talk is alright so that they can stand up and give it confidently. The talk forms quite a focus for all the other learning and involves skill in reading and writing as well as memorizing and speaking.

Year One students can talk about a tribal or Maori gathering they have been to recently. Year Two students tell a story or they talk about an issue they feel strongly about. Year Three is more on issues -- even international ones. The aim is to stretch their language. But even so, they have to observe strict time limits. That forces them not to be long-winded and to search for proverbs and short, witty sayings.

Organization

We place students based on the information they give in their applications. Most new students go into Year One or Year Two classes. For most students who come the first time, the language is the most important thing to them -- getting used to speaking Maori. But I notice that once the student feels comfortable speaking Maori, then they become more concerned with the messages that people are trying to give them. The messages become more important than the medium. This happens as the students move up the levels and is very encouraging.

Also, I have noticed that the more senior students can feel frustrated by the bell at the end of the session. They say they are not able to finish something they are very interested in. So that is where you need to have flexibility in your timetabling. The timetable really supports the first year students. It provides a secure environment, but as they become more competent they can be too limited by it. However, some timetabling is necessary for senior students. Variety is the spice of life, and students need to be given direction. At the beginning of the week classes are structured, but as they move towards the end of the week, they become less so.

We have been fortunate to have elders who have been prepared to go along with one-hour sessions. They have been happy to have changing groups of students. In the morning,

they might spend an hour with each of three different groups. I am sure that makes it interesting for them also. We need flexibility all the time. There have been times when sessions can be longer than an hour if necessary. Often we combined the three groups for a lecture-type presentation. But that is usually towards the end of the week, when people are a lot more comfortable with the whole situation. If it is genealogy, it is much better to have all the students together, especially if an elder is going to be present only a limited time. And they do not always want to be repeating themselves. Even if all the students do not understand everything the elder is saying, they do not miss out on the chance to hear them.

The person directing the immersion course knows that when they ring the bell, the classes can be at three possible stages. They might be just started, in the middle of things, or finished. One of the things I say to students during the orientation at the beginning is that "during the week you will not always have time to ask all the questions you want to, and you won't have time to get all the answers." We have to be fair so that all students have a chance to be exposed to each of the tutors.

In the future, as we get bigger, we might have to have total immersion courses just for Year One students, and shorter courses for them. Having three levels just gets too complex sometimes. It means we could have courses just for Year Two and Three for intermediate and advanced students which would be much easier. With only two levels there is more flexibility and the quality of interaction could be increased because the knowledge of the language is higher. You would be able to schedule longer sessions so that the students could really get to some depth in certain subjects.

Recreation

To allow people to relax and keep fit, we sometimes have exercises at the start of the day, at about seven o'clock in the morning, and after church services. We also have students move around. With three classes we have three different venues. So every hour the students and tutors have

to get up and walk to the next place. They can stretch their legs and get a breath of fresh air as well.

Also, everyone has their jobs to do in their work groups. So there is physical activity involved in clearing and setting tables, cleaning out the showers, etc. Right after lunch we usually have half an hour of fairly vigorous *waiata-a-ringa* or modern action songs so that students can shake the food down because if they go straight back to classes after lunch they tend to go off to sleep.

Towards the end of the day, between 3:30 pm and 5:30 pm, the students are free to do their own thing. This time is very important because students have had fairly intensive sessions. They need to take time out to relax or perhaps quietly look at dictionaries and mull over what has happened during the day. They might prepare for their presentations or debates, which are usually held in the evening sessions.

We often have some sports equipment, and this is a time when students get a chance to do physical exercise and play games -- all in Maori, of course! Actually, at one course, we invented language for playing softball. It was hilarious! The physical side is very important if at the end of the week people are to feel refreshed spiritually, mentally, and physically.

Speaking only Maori

In the program, it used to say, "*Ka whakatapua te reo Pakeha*." Now it says, "Church service -- self-imposed ban on the English language." This came about because of concern by some elders and students about the use of *'tapu'* – in particular what happens if a *tapu* is broken. Usually it is the local people or hosts who take the *karakia* to seal the contract. This is often a Christian service. Sometimes there are some traditional prayers. The home people, themselves, put the ban on because they have agreed that English will not be spoken on their *marae* for a week. Whenever the course finishes, they say the prayers which lift the English ban on all those there. That is a good thing, because let us face it, the hosts can speak whatever language they please on their own

marae. It is only through the support of the local people that we are able to have this ban on English.

There is usually a concert on Saturday night when the self-imposed ban on English is taken off. That is a good way of letting off steam in a positive and entertaining way. People need a way of winding down, of relaxing from what has been a very disciplined situation. The concert is great. It gives the students a chance to thank people who have cooked for them and looked after them all week. Sometimes the concert is in English, sometimes in Maori, and often it is a mix of both. Especially the first-time students feel they want to keep speaking Maori. I know that was my feeling in the early days. You grow to love your language and you do not want to give it up -- to emerge from the immersion -- to come out of the water. You want to stay in it. We do not have any alcohol. We do not need it to enjoy ourselves.

One of the real signs of progress in language revival for us has been the composition of new songs by a group of students who have now formed themselves into a Maori language pop band. Music and songs are a great way to promote Maori among the young. The concerts have proven to be a good training ground for composers and musicians.

We encourage students to stay on the *marae* for the whole course and not leave unless, of course, there are exceptional circumstances. Often they leave to go to a local school gymnasium, but if we have sport facilities on the *marae* it is better. We have had a funeral in the middle of a total immersion course. What happened was that the local people asked that the ban on English remain. We shifted ourselves to a local primary school and then returned, still speaking Maori, to help the local people of the *marae* in the kitchen. Even when people on the course have had to travel some distance to a Maori funeral they have maintained the ban. There is a certain shopkeeper in the town of Bulls who will never forget these strange people who came into the shop speaking only Maori. One of the things I think is important is that every student have a slip of paper on them to explain that they are attending an immersion course that week, that they

are not to speak English, and that they thank the non-Maori speaking person for their tolerance and cooperation.

Visitors to the *marae* should speak only in Maori. It is in our booklet, and we have a large notice near the entrance to the *marae* to remind people -- "Maori Language Zone." Transistors, tapes, and things like that are alright as long as they are playing Maori music -- that only Maori language is being listened to. A person can accidently speaks English without realising he or she has done so until others react. I point out that in such a case nothing dreadful is going to happen to a student. They will not get sick or anything. We just try to avoid these slips. But it is pointed out that learners are not allowed to say such things as "He *aha te kupu mo* table?" They are to use a dictionary instead.

It can take native speakers of Maori a whole week to adjust to speaking only Maori. Sometimes an elder can be tempted to speak English if he or she intuitively feels that the students are not understanding what is being said in Maori. However, I have often said to tutors and students that struggling to understand the message in Maori is an important strength of immersion. Perhaps the student might only understand this year fifty per cent of an elder's talk, next year it could be seventy per cent and so on. Constant exposure to the spoken language and struggling to understand are some of the real strengths of the immersion process.

Philosophy

It needs to be put across right at the start, to everyone involved, that the course is part of an experiment: a search for the most effective ways of reviving our language, of learning and teaching Maori. Everyone needs to realise that we are still learning how to organize these courses. Although I have now directed many courses, I still learn new things during each one, so we certainly have not arrived. We are still learning as we go along.

It is important to let students know that you need their support. Everyone involved in the course must work together as one big family: the tutors, the students, the local people, and the organizer. We also want students to know

that we want the course to be challenging and refreshing for them so that they can improve their language and their confidence. Students are expected to take full responsibility for their own learning. They have to get themselves organized, so that they can get the most out of their time, and not just rely on the formal sessions.

There are lots of opportunities on the *marae* when they can go up to an elder to ask about something they do not understand. A lot of learning can go on when students are with each other or with a tutor informally -- having a talk over a cup of tea, a conversation in the kitchen, or something like that. The other thing is that it really takes a lot of discipline. It is not easy. Let us face it. It is a lot easier to communicate in your first language (for us, English). And as an adult it can be really frustrating not being able to say in Maori something you know very well you can say in English.

It is very important that people overcome their feelings of embarrassment, of feeling bad about how they are speaking, over their mistakes and frustrations. This is a place where people can make mistakes and learn from them. No one will come down on them like a ton of bricks. To cope with all this it is important that students learn to pace themselves -- to make sure they get enough exercise and sleep. One thing that is a real "no-no" is falling asleep during classes. We are very fortunate to have the elders who come along to these courses, so we do not want students snoring in class!

We ask people to wear name-tags. "What! Our ancestors didn't have name-tags! That's a *Pakeha tikanga* (European custom)!" But the main reason is that the elders requested them. It is hard for older people to remember the names of all forty students. It is a lot more personal if they can read the names and quickly relate to a student. And the name-tags are a lot more than just a way of letting someone know a name. Wearing them is symbolic of the degree of alertness and commitment of the student.

The course is a kind of retreat. Besides the ban on English there are other restrictions. It is a very "dry" week in the sense that people are not allowed to drink alcohol. Cigarettes and food are not allowed in the meeting house

where the main sessions are held. It is really to maintain the level of *tapu*-ness. But it is also a time when students not only strengthen their language, but strengthen themselves so that they can go out into the world as stronger people.

One of the really important aspects of the immersion course is the *taha wairua* (spirituality). Each day starts and ends with prayers which are taken by students, tutors, or visiting clergy. It is very much a shared thing, but an optional activity. Not all students wish to lead a church service. The whole tone of the courses has improved with the strengthening of the *taha wairua*. The learners need to be at one with themselves. We have a lot of young people in these courses who are trying to work out their relationship to God both in terms of Christianity and in terms of Maori religious traditions. They need to be at peace with themselves and with others. Their hearts and minds need to be clear to gain as much as possible from the *hui*.

I think the immersion courses have given people hope. There is a lot more Maori spoken now in *Ngati Raukawa*, and a lot more confidence in spoken Maori. Young learners still make mistakes, but they know it is OK to do so. There is a whole group of younger people coming up who take immersion courses for granted, who expect to come and survive because a lot of people have been able to do it. There has also been a closer relationship developed between the elders and the young people. It is good for the elders because they enjoy seeing young people grow. And I find that is one of the real rewards for someone like myself in this program. The way the students look after and show concern for the elders and the elders do the same for the young people is so important. And the students look after the *marae* just as they find the *marae* looks after them.

The spin-offs from these courses are far more than just language growth. Relationships between old and young are strengthened. Relationships between students themselves are affected by spending a long time together on the *marae*. People become stronger in themselves and more hopeful about the tribal language situation. It is a big thing if you can

successfully stay on a *marae* for six to seven nights as one big family in harmony.

Aroha (loving empathy) is vital if our language is to be fully revived and developed. *Aroha* to God who gave us the gift of our language and who will strengthen us to protect, maintain, and develop this treasure to fulfill our dreams of Maori once again as a language of everyday life in *Aotearoa*/New Zealand. *Aroha* to our neighbors, our friends, our relations who are part of the language community and whose involvement and commitment is needed. And also *aroha* to the language. You need lots of it to spend six to seven days on a *marae* speaking only Maori.

....ko te mea nui, ko te aroha.

Love is a great thing.